Research Proposal of the Thesis Entitled

Study of Rural Tourism Development by Tribal Entrepreneurs in West Bengal

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by

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1. Introduction

“ILO’s Decent Work Agenda has an essential role to play in mitigating the specific social, economic, and environmental vulnerabilities of indigenous peoples, and tackling their high levels of poverty.”(Kumar Dhir, 2016)

West Bengal is the home of 9,12,76,115 people according to Census 2011, out of which 52,96,953 are scheduled tribes, which is approximately 5.8% within the overall population of the state. (*2011 Census Tribal Population - NIC -Statistics8518.Pdf*, n.d.). The districts of Paschim Medinipur, Jalpaiguri, and Puruliya are the three highest tribal populated districts as per the census 2011, with 8,80,015 people; 7,31,704 people, and 5,40,652 people respectively.Alipurduar was created by bifurcating the Jalpaiguri district in 2014. Before the establishment of Alipurduar district, as per the 2011 census, Jalpaiguri had 18.89% of the tribal population. The study introduces the tribal areas in West Bengal and the tribal entrepreneurs inthe provinces in the domain of rural tourism. It tries to elaborate on the prospectsand problems, if any, in terms of growth in rural tourism through tribal entrepreneurs.

2. Literature review

A detailedexploration of the literature was done toe study existing research on rural tourism in the tribal regions of West Bengal. The scope elaborated for the growth of tribal entrepreneurs and problems of resistance if any in the tribal areas. Thirty-five related articles/

documents/ research work conducted in the field has been studied. They are summarized below.

- **(Lane, 2009)**Rural tourism is inherently tied to rural settings and is defined by its distinct rural characteristics, including small-scale businesses, expansive open spaces, and opportunities for connection with nature. It emphasizes cultural and societal elements such as heritage, traditions, and community practices. This type of tourism is modest in scale and retains a traditional essence. It can take various forms, reflecting the diverse and intricate nature of rural environments. Visitors engage with village life, and their activities bring economic and additional benefits to the local communities.
- **(Das, 2017)**His research emphasizes that West Bengal, being a state with a significant female presence, holds immense potential to attract diverse types of tourists. Renowned for its rural charm, the state showcases its countryside appeal, as many of its tourist destinations are situated in rural regions.
- **(Ahamed, 2018b)**While studying the prospect of Ballavpur Danga Area, near Shantiniketan, in Birbhum district of West Bengal, which is majorly populated with tribes, and finding the growth aspect of rural tourism there, he states that "Rural tourism can substantially check the migration of people in search of jobs in cities like Kolkata. The gradual expansion of cities and increasing urbanisation are leading migration of rural people to urban areas. Rural tourism of this area is an important viable alternative which can provide a solution to this problem."
- **(Roy, 2019)**Folk Tourism is not only an amalgamation of sightseeing & entertainment but also accelerates the pace of the country's economic development by generating employment opportunities, earning foreign exchange, marketing the destination, strengthening communities, protecting & conserving the environment & active contribution to society."

- **(Biswas, 2017)**Sustainable tourism development focuses on managing the environmental and cultural resources of resident communities to enhance their economic welfare, protect their ecosystems, and sustain their cultural legacy. promote fair distribution of costs and benefits across present and future generations, ensure community self-reliance, and meet the expectations of tourists.
- **(Ray et al., 2012)**His paper notes that a tourist destination, initially situated in a remote rural area, has gained prominence owing to its historical relevance, by the local governing body. Over time, it has been transformed into a tourist village through various enhancements, such as improved public facilities, better transportation infrastructure, tourism and accommodation facilities, and the development of handicraft industries. This transformation has significantly impacted the area's economy, leading to advancement in the craft industry, increased job opportunities, and improvements in the lifestyle of the local community.
- **(Sharpley & Telfer, 2002)**Tourism employment encompasses all direct, indirect, and induced job opportunities generated by the tourism industry, spanning both formal and informal sectors.
- **(Karmakar, 2011)** The fundamental findings are that nature tourism has improved the economic opportunities of local people and other stakeholders through income and employment generation in the peripheral areas of North Bengal mainly communities near National Park. These so-called economically backward areas can be developed through the promotion of nature tourism. … Therefore, proper managerial implications should be carried out to increase its economic contribution to the peripheral areas, broaden its entrepreneurial base, and achieve some economies of scale in its tourism operation.
- **(Choudhury et al., n.d.)**The expansion of village tourism is immensely advantageous to a developing nation similar to India, where roughlythree-fourthsof the population lives in

over 70 lacs rural areas. Rural development involves not only improving the economic conditions of the people but also fostering significant social transformation.Rural tourism can significantly contribute to providing enhanced financial growth prospects for remote communities.

- **(Baskey, 2016)**Research scholar Sunil Kumar Baskey (2016) highlighted that since independence, the Government of India has initiated numerous programs aimed at the development of tribal communities and their regions to enhance their standard of living and protect them from exploitation. Despite the allocation of thousands of crores for the development of a few million people, the results have been far from satisfactory. Tribals continue to face issues such as hunger, malnutrition, poverty, low literacy rates, inadequate healthcare, and diminishing natural capital. The condition of the tribal population remains particularly dire. Although the Government of India has focused on their development, the literacy levels, income, socio-economic status, and living conditions of the tribal people remain discouraging, possibly due to various underlying factors.
- **(Sharma & Katoch, 2022)**Rural tourism involves exploring rural life and communities, craftsmanship, traditions, with cultural legacy in countryside regions. while simultaneously boosting the local economy by creating livelihood opportunities for villagers. It fosters engagement between travelers and the residents' community, leading to a positive and advantageous interaction for both parties. Key elements of rural tourism include local development, job creation, infrastructure improvement, cultural preservation, environmental conservation, and the promotion of harmony and understanding.
- **(Rajeev Kumra, 2008)**"Any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, thereby benefiting the local community economically and

socially as well as enabling interaction between the tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience can be termed as rural tourism."

- **(Talekar & Potdar, 2012)**Agro-tourism is a form of eco-conscious recreation development that promotes a variety of activities in rural areas. It grants visitors the possibility to explore agricultural landscapes and understand farming practices, domestic products, authentic cuisine, and the everyday life of rural communities, along with societal customs and rituals. Additionally, this form of tourism connects visitors to nature and rural life, allowing them to engage in activities, enjoy entertainment, and experience the joys of rural tourism.
- **(Singh & Vikas Dangi, 2014)**The potential of rural tourism in India was recognized relatively late compared to other global areas. The Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007) identified tourism as a key driver to stimulate job creation and promote enduring livelihoods. In 2004, the Indian Ministry of Tourism, alongside the UNDP, unveiled the Community-Based Tourism Program, aligning it with the government's operational countryside travel program.
- **(Seong-Woo & Sou-Yeon, 2006)**Rural areas are no longer limited to agriculture; they play a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage, traditions, and biodiversity. In this context, policymakers in Korea acknowledge the significance of rural-based tourism and industrialization as vital strategies for enhancing rural areas.
- **(Sasu & Epuran, 2016)**The volume of travellers engaging in rural tourism is steadily increasing, as they seek a more responsible or eco-friendly form of travel. Simultaneously, tourists are focusing on destinations that provide unique, authentic experiences, where the local lifestyle plays a central role. This approach helps to steer clear of the standardized nature of mass tourism.

- **(Saravanan & Rao, 2013)** Entrepreneurship in tourism activities brings innovation and creativity in business that drives community tourism development. Higher levels of entrepreneurial activity in tourism increase the likelihood of developing attractions and support businesses, leading to enhanced socioeconomic benefits from tourism development.
- **(Ramjit, 2015)**Rural tourism entrepreneurship should be prioritized in the Kashmir region for several key reasons: 1. To optimize the utilization of native resources, both manpower and materials. 2. To generate additional employment opportunities for all types of rural labor. 3. To improve living standards and enhance income sources. 4. To examine the scope for developing upstream and downstream linkages via vertical and horizontal workforce integration. 5. To preserve and promote the traditional culture and values while enriching them through tourist interactions. 6. To foster greater awareness of eco-biodiversity.
- **(Rambodagedara et al., 2015)**Agro-tourism is recognized as an entrepreneurial venture that offers the chance to market the "experience" of an agricultural location, making the most of available resources in an efficient manner. Value is created by offering various activities linked to agriculture and rural environments.
- **(Mohanty, 2014)**Rural tourism involves activities conducted in the villages and encompasses a collection of forms such as farming-based exploration, ethnicvacationing, biodiversity touring, exploratory tourism, and eco-friendly tourism. Village tourism stands apart from traditional tourism through its unique characteristics: it emphasizes experiential activities, occurs in sparsely populated regions, is predominantly situated in natural settings, follows seasonal patterns and community events, and emphasizes the safeguarding of culture, heritage, and customs.
- **(Khangarot & Sahu, 2019)**Rural tourism is a broad segment that includes specialized areas like thrill tourism, pilgrimage travel, heritage tourism, and academic exploration. Agro-tourism is a key component that grows alongside the advancement of countryside

tourism, offering an authentic experience in a tranquil setting. Activities like attending cattle fairs, visiting local temples dedicated to deities, participating in indigenous practices, and enjoying cultural and folk performances provide tourists with a genuine and immersive experience.

- **(Khanal & Shrestha, 2019)**Exhibitions provide direct benefits to farmers, exhibitors, visitors, and tourists, ultimately contributing to the nation's economic growth. Agro-exhibitions serve as a significant platform for interaction, live communication, and marketing, allowing stakeholders to showcase their vision, engage in exchanges, conduct trade, and display their products. Events like the International Fair of Economy, Agriculture, Food, and Tourism in Nepal feature various expos, including those for poultry, apples, wine, livestock, seeds, agro-machinery, exportable decorative flowers, tea, cardamom, medicinal plants, and more.
- **(Kazmina et al., 2020)**There is no universal approach to tourism development; each village must gradually discover its own unique practices, themes, and defining moments to create and refine its distinctive tourism products and offerings. Agritourism clustering encourages the evolution of business models within this sector. The development of agritourism business models is shaped by factors such as the region's historical and cultural traits, along with the environmental, community, and financial development of rural economies.
- **(Kapur, 2016)**In addressing the rural-urban divide, rural tourism emerges as a crucial commercial operation and service for rural communities, positioning them as both "producers" and "providers" of services. Tourists visit rural areas to experience rural life firsthand, and in exchange, villagers earn money from the visitors. This not only creates additional or alternative income sources for them but also opens numerous opportunities for entrepreneurial ventures and self-employment.The core idea of rural tourism is to

support local rural communities by promoting rural enterprises, generating income, creating employment opportunities, conserving resources, and fostering the growth of rural arts and crafts. It also encourages infrastructure investment while ensuring the preservation of the environment and heritage.

- **(Joshi et al., 2020)**Agro-tourism not only connects urban visitors with the lives of farmers but also holds significant economic value. It provides tourists with lasting memories through pollution-free, serene, and peaceful stays,while simultaneously boosting farmers' incomes. The objectives of agro-tourism are twofold: offering both recreational and educational experiences.
- **(Jena & Dwivedi, 2021)**The expansion of rural tourism in India can greatly aid economic progress. The administration should acknowledge the value of tourism in countryside areas and establish a conducive, viable framework for all involved parties. Participants must collaborate with decision-making authorities to pinpoint the factors and obstacles limiting the growth of rural tourism in India. Additionally, the administration should make available sufficient backing and affordable infrastructure to encouragetourism in rural belt. “The expansion of rural tourism in India relies on various factors, including marketing, advertising, government assistance, safety, and security.”
- **(Islam, 2017)**Rural tourismevolved as a vital approach to the development of sustainable tourism. This idea has already been implemented in advanced nations, producing favourable results. Our country and its villages offer a wealth of attractions to satisfy the diverse interests of travelers. The rural lifestyle, social norms, traditions, handicrafts, scenic landscapes, and natural beauty have the potential to draw visitors regardless of their tastes, perceptions, or preferences. Rural tourism refers to various journeys made to locations outside major cities and coastal resorts, whether for holidays, day excursions, business, or visiting family and friends.

- **(Hazarika, 2016)**Tourism is an industry that connects the world, enhances knowledge, promotes cultural exchange, and fosters global understanding. It is classified as one of the most significant industries globally in terms of earnings and job creation. People around the globe are increasingly drawn to rural areas for tourism. This emerging tourism sector can serve as a means for generating jobs and fuelling financial growth.
- **(Gopal et al., 2008)**The significance of rural tourism within the broader tourism market is influenced by a country's recreational and travel assets, facilities, economic accessibility, and availability of additional tourism offerings. Although tourism in remote areas can constitute a smaller share of the total tourism market in many nations, its significance can be vital to the growth of particular rural regions.
- **(Ahamed, 2018a)**Since 2002, various rural tourism initiatives have been launched in India to showcase rural life, creativity, traditions, and legacy in village settings. The primary goal is to promote the socio-financial expansion of local groups while fostering engagement among visitors and the local community, fostering a mutually rewarding experience

3. Problem Definition

The UN's framework for achieving sustainable development (UNSDG) include the commitment that "no one will be left behind." This vision holds particular importance for the more than 3700 lacsnative people globally, who have, over the years endured severe inequalities and a significant number of them still experience exclusion andmisuse. The UNSDG seeks to build a world free from deprivation, starvation, and sickness, where all females experience equal social identity rights, the ecosystem is preserved, and all individuals have the opportunity for effective education and fair employment. This vision strives for a global place that welcomes everyone, supportable, harmonious, thriving, and unbiased related to race, civilization, social background, or inability.

Numerous initiatives and projects have been undertaken to promote the societal and financial development of tribal groups, tribal entrepreneurship being among them. Rural tourism is a rapidly expanding sector worldwide, encouraging rural people to take the initiative and start their ventures. There has been a lot of research work that was done identifying the issues of tribal people in the tribal belt, this paper is trying to find out the keys that can encourage tribal entrepreneurs to participate and be involved in rural tourism development. The avenue has undoubtedly high prospects and promises in terms of job creation and self-sustainability.

Some challenges are faced by tribal people in exploring entrepreneurship, which includelimited access to funding and networks, cultural prejudices, challenges in maintaining work-life balance, lack of finance, scarcity of resources, problems of marketing, and high costs of inputs. This paper examines the opportunities and explores the contribution of tribal entrepreneurs in fostering the growth of rural tourism.

4. Objectives of the Study

- **Major Objective** - To explore the influence of rural tourism on tribal regions of West Bengal.
- **Sub Objectives**
  - To identify the challenges of rural tourism in the district of Purulia.
  - To offer guidance and proposals for strategies to promote tribal entrepreneurs to join rural tourism, resulting in socio-economic upgradation.

5. Research Questions

1. How does rural tourism affect the economy of tribal communities in West Bengal?
2. How do tribal entrepreneurs in West Bengal finance their tourism ventures?

3. What challenges do tribal entrepreneurs face in developing and sustaining rural tourism businesses?
4. In what ways do tribal entrepreneurs incorporate their cultural heritage into tourism offerings?
5. How effective are government programs in supporting tribal tourism enterprises?
6. What improvements can be made to current policies to better support tribal entrepreneurs in the tourism sector?
7. How do tribal entrepreneurs incorporate sustainable practices in their tourism ventures?
8. How do tribal entrepreneurs leverage community-based tourism models to enhance their ventures?

6. Hypothesis

1. *Hypothesis 1*

H0: Rural tourism significantly enhances the income levels of tribal entrepreneurs in West Bengal.

H1: Rural tourism does not enhance the income levels of tribal entrepreneurs in West Bengal.

2. *Hypothesis 2*

H0: Government policies and initiatives significantly impact the growth and sustainability of tribal tourism businesses.

H1: Government policies and initiatives do not significantly impact the growth and sustainability of tribal tourism businesses.

7. Research Methodology

Research Design:

Testing the hypotheses on the study of rural tourism development by tribal entrepreneurs in West Bengal requires a comprehensive research methodology. This methodology should

integrate both qualitative and quantitative approaches to collect, analyze, and interpret data efficiently.

Data Collection Methods

- Surveys and Questionnaires:
    - Designing structured questionnaires targeting tribal entrepreneurs, local community members, tourists, and government officials.
    - Collecting data on economic impact, challenges, opportunities, cultural impacts, and environmental practices.
- Interviews:
    - Conducting semi-structured interviews with tribal entrepreneurs, tourism officials, and key community leaders to gain qualitative insights.
    - Focussing on challenges faced, innovative practices, and perceptions of government policies.
- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):
    - Organizing FGDs with community members to understand collective perceptions of tourism development and its social and cultural impacts.
- Observations:
    - Performing field visits to observe the operational aspects of tribal tourism businesses and their environmental practices.
- Secondary Data Analysis:
    - Analysing existing reports, government documents, and previous research studies on rural tourism and tribal entrepreneurship.

Data Analysis

- Quantitative Analysis:

    - The hypothesis will be tested using the relevant tests like Chi-Square, T-Test, ANOVA, etc
    - Analysing the survey data to test hypotheses related to economic impact, marketing effectiveness, and environmental practices.
- Qualitative Analysis:
    - Employing thematic analysis to detect patterns and themes.in interview and FGD transcripts.
    - Interpreting
    - qualitative findings to provide context and a deeper understanding of quantitative results.

8. Expected Outcome

The study of rural tourism development by tribal entrepreneurs in West Bengal highlights its importance in improving local economies and preserving cultural heritage. However, challenges remain, and there is potential for future research in identifying effective strategies to support these entrepreneurs. Sustainable practices and further community involvement will be key in shaping the future of tribal tourism in the region. The study is expected to identify some challenges faced by rural tourism development:

- **Lack of proper coordination** between tourism and other government departments
- **Inadequate tourist amenities and connectivity** in rural areas
- **Need for strategic planning** to minimize negative sociocultural and environmental impacts

To overcome these challenges, the study recommends:

- **Improving regional connectivity** through better roads, railways, and airports

- **Developing tourist facilities** like accommodation and theme-based resorts in rural areas
- **Collaborating with other state governments** for holistic tourism promotion
- **Providing financial and institutional support** to rural tourism enterprises

In summary, the study aims to emphasize the significant potential of rural tourism in empowering tribal entrepreneurs and driving the Social and commercial progress of rural groups in West Bengal.With strategic planning and government support, rural tourism has the potential to greatly elevate the living standard of these regions.

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